

One of the unfortunate characteristics of the times we live in is the overwhelming presence of violence in our societies. Whether it is a bomb going off in a market place, or the hijacking of an aircraft where innocent people are held at ransom to achieve political ends, we live in an age, where the loss of innocent lives has become commonplace. Such is the nature of indiscriminate violence, that "terrorism" is considered as one of the greatest threats to peace and security in our societies.

The word terrorism came into wide usage only a few decades ago. One of the unfortunate results of this new terminology is that it limits the definition of terrorism to that perpetrated by small groups or individuals. Terrorism, in fact, spans the entire world, and manifests itself in various forms. Its perpetrators do not fit any stereotype. Those who hold human lives cheap, and have the power to expend human lives, appear at different levels in our societies. An individual who blows himself up on a civilian bus has committed an act of terrorism. Likewise, "carpet bombing" of entire cities, and using the weapon of sanctions that starve tens of thousands of children to death, is also an act of terrorism.

The narrow definition of terrorism that implicates only individuals and groups, and the mass hysteria in the media, has caused Muslims to be associated with acts of destruction and terror, and as a result, to become victims of hate violence. Sometimes the religion of Islaam is held responsible for the acts of a handful of Muslims, and even for the acts of non-Muslims!

Could it be possible that Islaam, whose light ended the Dark Ages in Europe, now propound the advent of an age of terror? Could a faith that has over 1.2 billion followers the world over, actually advocate the killing and maiming of innocent people? Could Islaam, whose name itself stands for "peace" and "submission to God", encourage its adherents to work for destruction?

### **The Sanctity Of Human Life**

Islaam considers all life forms as sacred. However, the sanctity of human life is accorded a special place. The first and the foremost basic right of a human being is the right to live. Allaah says in the Qur'aan about the one who kills an innocent person:

**"....it would be as if he killed the whole of mankind: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole of mankind."**  
[Al-Qur'aan 5:32]

Such is the value of a single human life; Allaah in the Qur'aan equates the taking of even one human life unjustly, with killing all of humanity. Thus, Allaah in the Qur'aan prohibits murder in clear terms.

### **The Ethics Of War**

Even in a state of war, Islaam enjoins that one deals with the enemy nobly on the battlefield. Islaam has drawn a clear line of distinction between the combatants and the non-combatants of the enemy country. As far as the non-combatant population is concerned such as women, children, the old and the infirm, the

instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) are as follows:

"Do not kill any old person, any child or any woman" and "Do not kill the monks in monasteries" or "Do not kill the people who are sitting in places of worship."

Thus non-combatants are guaranteed security of life even if their state is at war with an Islaamic state.

## Jihaad

While Islaam in general is misunderstood in the western world; perhaps no other Islaamic term evokes such strong reactions as the word "jihaad". The term "jihaad" has been much abused, to conjure up bizarre images of violent Muslims, forcing people to submit at the point of the sword. This myth was perpetuated throughout the centuries of mistrust between Christians and Muslims. Unfortunately, it survives to this day.

The word Jihaad comes from the root word jahaada, which means to struggle. So jihaad is literally an act of struggling. The Prophet Muhammad (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said that jihaad is to struggle with the insidious suggestions of one's own soul. Thus jihaad primarily refers to the inner struggle of being a person of virtue, and submission to God in all aspects of life.

Secondly, jihaad refers to struggle against injustice. Islaam, like other religions, allows for self-defence. Allaah says in the Qur'aan:

**"And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated, Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will protect; and raise for us from You one who will help'." [Al-Qur'aan 4: 75]**

## Suicide Bombings

Suicide bombings are contrary to Islaam. The famous Scholar, Shaykh al-'Uthaymeen was asked: "What is the ruling regarding acts by means of suicide, such as attaching explosives to a car and storming the enemy, whereby he knows without a doubt that he shall die as a result of this action?" He replied: "Indeed, my opinion is that he is regarded as one who has killed himself, and as a result he shall be punished in Hell, for it is authenticated that the Prophet Muhammad (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

'Indeed, whoever (intentionally) kills himself, then certainly he will be punished in the Fire of Hell, wherein he shall dwell forever'."

Thus Islaam enjoins upon its believers to strive in purifying themselves, as well as establishing peace & justice in the society. Regardless of how legitimate the cause may be, the Qur'aan never condones killing innocent people. Terrorising defenceless civilians, and the bombing and maiming of innocent men, women, and children are all detestable acts according to Islaam and Muslims. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness, and the vast majority have nothing to do with the violent acts that have been attributed to Muslims.

## History of Tolerance

Western scholars have refuted the myth of Muslims coercing others to convert. The historian De Lacy O'Leary wrote in Islaam at Crossroads:

"History makes it clear, that the legend of fanatical Muslims, sweeping through the world and forcing Islaam at the point of sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated."

Muslims ruled Spain for roughly 800 years. During this time, the non-Muslims there were alive and flourishing. Additionally, Christian and Jewish minorities have flourished in the Muslim lands of the Middle East for centuries, often arriving to escape the pogroms in Europe. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan all have significant Christian and/or Jewish populations. This is not surprising to a Muslim, for his faith prohibits him from forcing others to see his point of view, and in fact guarantees them protection. Allaah says in the Qur'aan:

**"Let there be no compulsion in religion."** [Al-Qur'aan 2:256]

## Islaam - The Great Unifier

Far from being an intolerant dogma, Islaam is a way of life that transcends race and ethnicity. The Qur'aan repeatedly reminds us of our common origin, Allaah says:

**"O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."** [Al-Qur'aan 49:13]

Thus, it is the universality of its teachings that makes Islaam the fastest growing religion in the world. In a world full of conflicts between human beings, a world that is threatened with terrorism, perpetrated by individuals and states, Islaam is a beacon of light that offers hope for the future.

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